

# The Frick Collection: Detail Report

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Constantine the Great, Emperor of Rome (b. 285;  
r. 307–37)

Unknown artist

**Date** 1402/13

**Medium** Copper alloy, cast

**Dimensions** Diam.: 3 11/16 in. (9.32 cm)

**Credit Line** Dr. Stephen K. and Janie Woo Scher Collection

**Accession Number** SCHER.2014.15.54

Currently On View

Second Floor, Room 32, Medals Room

**Commentary** This medal is among the most important sources for the portrait medals that emerged in Italy in the fifteenth century, the history of which is complex and not fully understood. The two medals appear to derive from a set of eight gold discs recorded in the collection of Jean de France, Duke of Berry (1340–1416). These discs, the originals of which do not survive, bore reliefs related to Roman emperors on both sides and were mounted in jeweled frames to be worn around the neck. The duke commissioned copies of the discs to be made in gold depicting Constantine and Heraclius. These were not subsequently mounted or embellished with jewels. The present examples are among many made of these initial copies in various materials since the fourteenth century. Their style suggests a Franco-Flemish artist, though the originals may have been Italian. Based on style, Stephen K. Scher attributes them to Michelet Saulmon (act. 1375–1416), the duke's court painter. Both medals are related to the history of the True Cross. There is no consensus regarding the iconography of the reverse of the present medal. Mark Jones argues that the two female figures on the reverse are Sarah and Hagar, the mothers of Abraham's sons Isaac and Ishmael. The reverse is an elaborate allegory of the True Cross and the Fountain of Life. It was Constantine's mother, Helena, who discovered the True Cross in the location where it had been buried. Source: Scher, Stephen K., et al. *The Scher Collection of Commemorative Medals*. New York and London, 2019.